

AUSTRALIANS AT WAR – WWI

Conscription

Introduction

By 1916 fewer men were volunteering to go overseas to fight in the war.

Casualties were growing.

The Government wanted to increase the number of recruits through conscription, and not just through volunteers.

Conscription

The Federal Government had the power under the Defence Act to conscript men into the army, but those men could only serve in Australia. They could not be sent overseas to fight.

The Government could change the Act of Parliament to extend the power to conscript men for overseas service, but it did not have a majority of votes in support in the Senate.

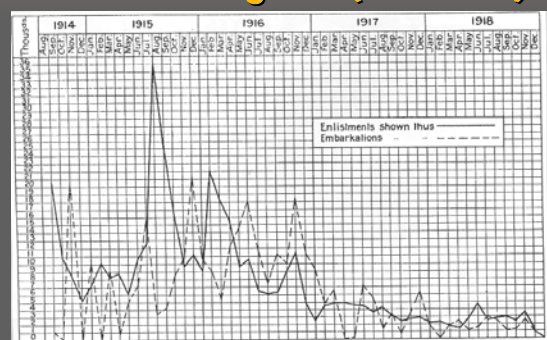
The conscription debate

In 1916 and again in 1917 the Government held a 'referendum' or a 'plebiscite' on the issue – really a giant public opinion poll. The government hoped that a large majority of the population would vote for conscription, and this would convince some Senators that the people wanted it, and they should therefore change the Act.

The conscription debate

The people voted narrowly against conscription in 1916, and again in 1917 when the Government tried a second time.

Enlistment Figures (1914-1918)



Results of Votes (1916 and 1917)

2 Results of the votes

1916				
State	Yes	No	Soldiers' Component	
			Yes	No
NSW	356,805	474,544	NA	NA
Vic	353,930	328,216	NA	NA
Qld	144,200	158,051	NA	NA
SA	87,924	119,236	NA	NA
WA	94,069	40,884	NA	NA
Tas	48,493	37,833	NA	NA
Fed. Territory	2,136	1,269	NA	NA
TOTAL	1,087,557	1,160,033	72,399	58,894

1917				
State	Yes	No	Soldiers' Component	
			Yes	No
NSW	341,256	487,774	36,138	35,316
Vic	329,772	332,490	29,576	25,778
Qld	132,771	168,875	13,866	12,924
SA	86,663	106,364	9,701	8,087
WA	84,116	46,522	11,006	8,374
Tas	38,881	38,502	3,502	3,431
Fed. Territory	1,700	1,220	NA	NA
TOTAL	1,015,159	1,181,747	103,789	93,910

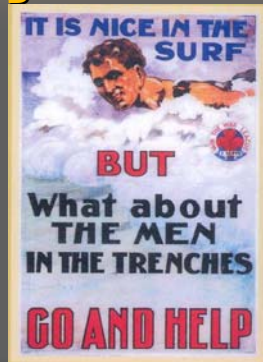
Look at the following examples of campaign documents and complete the following:

1. Decide if they support the Yes or No case
2. Decide to whom they are appealing, whom they want to influence
3. List the main reasons being put why people should support or oppose conscription
4. Why might some be specifically directed to women?
5. What effect might this have on women?

A



B



C



D



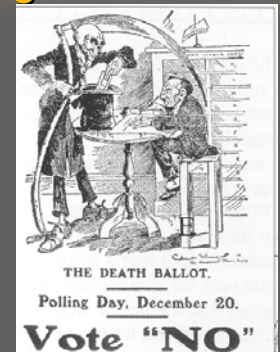
E



F



G



H



I



J



K

AN Open Letter to Women

Do you know where you are sending the boys? Do you know what you are sending them to? You do not know. You will never know from your own experience. You must rely on what you are told by the men who have been there; by the men who have come back. These men say—a thousand of them are saying at the Trades Hall—that if women only knew where they were sending the men—what they were forcing these into—women would never vote for the men to go.

But do you think where you are sending them? Do you think about it at all? Have you, who stay at home, the right to send others away? You may be strong, brave, willing to face much suffering and endure much pain. But are all the boys as strong, as brave, and as wise as soldiers should be? Can they stand long years of suffering away from home and from the women they love? You are voting to send many boys away from their homes—boys who are not cowards, boys who are not heroes, boys who will never come back. Some of the boys you send will never come back. Some you send to die, some to be maimed, some who are young, and weak, and unwilling, you send to be dishonored.

Some of the boys you send will never come back. It is a hard thing for a woman to send a man to his death. The only man she can possibly have a right to send is a man who loves her and whom she loves. There is not one of you, there is not a woman in the world, who would send a man she loved, whether husband or son, or sweetheart, or brother, to war as a conscript. Then do not vote to send that unknown man, whom you do not love, but whom some other woman loves and cares for.

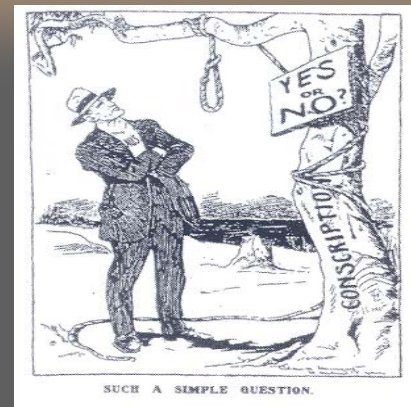
You think that by conscription you are going to win the war. Can you win the war by sending those boys who do not want to go? Only the unwilling are conscripts; the willing are volunteers. Many boys are unwilling boys. They are afraid of the home-coming. Will the girls who voted to send them away be willing and able to look after them when they come back? Some will be willing; some will be able; but how can a girl, who is dependent on her parents, or a girl who has no home, and earns only a few shillings a week, look after a man who is blind, a man who is a cripple, a man who is not "all there"? The thriftiest girl could not do it.

Your women who preach thrift, should be thrifty with the bodies of men.

Vote NO on December 20

Printed by the "Citizens' League," 201 Queen Street, Melbourne.

L



Finish the following sentences:

The votes on the issue of conscription were very close because...

The issue of conscription caused great bitterness, division and conflict in Australian society because...